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Subject: Role of the GRP in the Indonesian-East Timor Conflict

NOTE: In accordance with your request and as an advocate of self-determination for East Timor, hereunder is a draft proposal on the role the Government of the Republic of the Philippines is encouraged to take in the resolution of the conflict between Indonesia and East Timor. This submission is made in my personal and private capacity and in no way purports or attempts to represent the views of any of the parties to the conflict.

1. **Background Information:** Indonesia is a country that was born out of the territories and peoples colonized by Holland. East Timor was colonized by Portugal. It was never colonized by the Dutch.

   To begin, let me quote an internationally known and respected Indonesian leader:

   The Government of Indonesia (until) now still adheres to the following principles:

   I. The independence of every country is the right of every nation, with no exception for the people in (East) Timor.

   II. The Government as well as the people of Indonesia have no intention to increase or to expand their territory, or to occupy other territories other that what is stipulated in their Constitution....

   III. ... whoever will govern in Timor in the future after independence can be assured that the Government of Indonesia will always strive to maintain good relations, friendship and cooperation for the benefit of both countries. (quoted from a letter written by Mr. Adam Malik, Foreign Minister of Indonesia to Mr. Jose Ramos Horta on June 17, 1974, and reproduced in the book *East*

Timor: Nationalism & Colonialism by Jill Jolliffe. A copy of this document is attached.)

Yet on December 7, 1975 Indonesia invaded East Timor. By 1981, more than 200,000 Timorese had died; entire villages were obliterated; whole tribes were wiped out; women raped in front of their husbands and children; men tortured and killed in front of their families; the wealth of the country looted; and steps were taken to obliterate native languages as well as their culture.

Although Indonesia claims that some troops have been withdrawn, fresh troops are sent to replace them on a regular basis. The military crackdown, according to various international organizations, have been most vicious and torture has become a pervasive way of life.

The Indonesian problem regarding East Timor, even after almost 20 years since the invasion, has not disappeared, much to Indonesia's consternation. It has refused to die down. International newspapers such as the *Washington Post, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Times* of London, *The Nation* of Bangkok have come out with editorials calling for self-determination in East Timor. Even in Indonesia itself, voices of moderation, at the risk to their life and freedom, have been heard calling for change.

There has likewise been a change of attitude in the US government with regard to the East Timor problem. Steps to redress the injustice have found a sympathetic ear both in the Clinton administration and in the US Congress.

More importantly, the UN Secretary-General has taken a more personal interest in the issue.

If peace talks between Israel and Palestine have become possible, why cannot peace talks between Indonesia and East Timor be held with the GRP acting as mediator?

One of the more common views being promoted by Indonesia is that East Timor is such a small territory and therefore the rest of the world can afford not to be bothered by its invasion. True – East Timor is a relatively small country. But with its area of 18,889 square kilometers and its total population of 700,000 (1974 figures), it is at least equal if not larger in size and population than at least 30 independent states who are members of the United Nations. It is almost 10 times the size of Luxembourg and has twice the population. It is sixty times larger than the Seychelles.

In terms of natural resources, East Timor is potentially self-sufficient in most agricultural products. It also has large oil reserves and other minerals.

Even after independence, their leaders have stated that they will have no standing army, as the money saved thereby will be allocated to what they believe is their best resource – their people. Forty percent of their resources will be used, through massive investment, in health and education. They hope that with the cooperation of the WHO, they can eradicate malaria, tuberculosis and other preventable diseases within a decade.

Finally, let me quote a leading figure of the East Timorese movement for self-determination:

We will proclaim a general amnesty and national reconciliation. To be true to ourselves, we will forgive our worst enemies. For a society to be healthy, sane and happy, it cannot be based on hatred and revenge. Because of its credibility and standing over the past twenty years, the (Catholic) Church will be expected to play a major role in the healing process of our society.... It is estimated that 100,000 Indonesians are now living in East Timor. Most are poor Indonesians who came to our country looking for a better life. We would not be true to ourselves if we were to turn our back on our poor neighbors. Indonesian migrants in East Timor will be welcome to stay with us to build a better home for us all. They have brought with them the wealth of their culture which can enrich the whole community.
(quoted from a statement by Mr. Jose Ramos Horta, November 1993)

Given all these, would not the Philippines, in general, and President Ramos, in particular, attain not only a lot of international goodwill, but President Ramos' role in serving as the bridge to peace in resolving one of the world community's intractable conflicts will forever be etched in the history of nations.

2. **Present Situation:** The Republic of Indonesia has maintained a virtually intransigent position vis a vis any and all proposals (in particular those from the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, the Government of Portugal, and the East Timorese themselves) to resolve the almost 20-year East Timor question, insisting that this is purely an internal matter. The ASEAN governments presently have adhered to the Indonesian position that the East Timor issue is an internal matter to Indonesia. Notwithstanding this hardline position, however, the international situation as well as internal Indonesian conditions

appear to have undergone some changes that may contribute to a more positive outlook.

2.1. The Clinton administration has, in no uncertain terms, viewed human rights in Indonesia with a critical eye. Clinton's latest position with respect to China in the face of efforts to de-link trade and human rights is instructive.

2.2. Most European governments have taken a critical attitude towards Indonesian position on the East Timor question. Portugal has exercised a veto of a new ASEAN-EC agreement.

2.3. The United Nations which has become a primary arena for the East Timorese struggle is presently taking a definitely more positive attitude toward the resolution of the conflict.

2.4. Indonesia of late has been trying to firm-up its leadership role within the Non-Aligned Movement. Such leadership will stand on shaky ground as more and more nations (prodded by solidarity movements of its peoples) identify with the self-determination struggle of the East Timorese.

2.5. Recent reports seem to indicate the interest of Indonesia in becoming a member of the United Nations Security Council. Their chances of obtaining this objective will be impaired by its intransigence on the question of East Timor.

2.6. The regime of Suharto is coming to a close. He is presently perceived to be on his last term. Signs of positioning among his followers and various interest groups, including the Christian groups, are increasingly becoming visible.

3. **Philippine Role:** The good relations between the Philippine and Indonesian governments have never been in doubt. Indonesia, in fact, has been rather supportive of the Philippines. The GRP on the other hand has reciprocated this by recognizing the leadership role of Suharto in the region.

In the light of the foregoing, it would seem that the time may be opportune for neighboring countries, especially those whose friendship can not be doubted such as the Philippines, to play a role towards securing peace and stability in the region. It would seem that the Philippines is in the best position to play a positive role in the resolution of the Indonesian-East Timor conflict.

3.1. The Philippines, and President Ramos in particular as a former general, cannot be suspected by Indonesia of ulterior motives if the GRP attempts to mediate in the Indonesia-East Timor conflict.

3.2. The continuing attempts of President Ramos to play a positive role in the regional arena, if not the international field itself, would gain more credibility by taking the lead in trying to resolve the Indonesia-East Timor problem.

3.3. The respect of other nations would be greatly enhanced if the Philippines takes the lead in trying to mobilize international support for the resolution of the Indonesia-East Timor issue. Having taken a leading role in the resolution of the Indonesia-East Timor question, the GRP for example would reap unquantifiable benefits that would be derived from the lifting of the Portuguese veto of a new ASEAN-EC agreement alone. Portugal's positive role with regard to RP's particular relations with EC and Latin America cannot be discounted.

3.4. **A proposal coming from the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, a good neighbor and friend, may just be the acceptable face-saving way out of the dilemma that the Indonesian government faces. The proposal does not necessarily have to be new or novel.** ***That it comes at the right time and from the right party is perhaps more important.***

4. **Requisites:** It is imperative that certain requisites are met before any proposal to resolve the conflict between Indonesia and East Timor can even get off the ground.

4.1. No fanfare or publicity.

4.2. A minimum (preferably the absence) of preconditions save perhaps that the negotiations be undertaken under UN auspices.

4.3. Respect for the dignity and integrity of both parties.

4.4. The proposal should give both parties the opportunity to be able to claim victory before both their constituencies. For Indonesia: recognition of the legitimacy of its continuing presence in East Timor. For East Timor: the phasing out of Indonesian authority and the assertion of Timorese self-determination.

5. **Proposal Outline:**

5.1. **Period of Confidence-Building:** (up to 2 years) Without dealing with the essence of self-determination, this period should be spent in achieving the following: (some examples)

5.1.1. Appoint a resident Representative of the UN Secretary-General to signify end of armed hostilities in East Timor.
5.1.2. Significant reduction of Indonesian troop presence and military heavy equipment and armaments within a specific period.
5.1.3. Programmed and specified transfer of responsibilities from Indonesian to Timorese civil servants.
5.1.4. Release of all political prisoners.
5.1.5. Freedom of political activities.
5.1.6. Establishment of a Human Rights Commission under a Catholic Bishop.

5.2. **Period of Autonomy:** (5 to 10 years) a period of political autonomy with powers vested in a local, democratically elected Territorial People's Assembly. The following could be explored and put into effect: (some examples)

5.2.1. Legalization of political parties.
5.2.2. UN-supervised elections for a Territorial Assembly, including election of Territorial Executive (Governor)
5.2.3. UN-trained police force to be placed under the supervision of the elected Territorial Executive.
5.2.4. Withdrawal of the remaining Indonesian troops.
5.2.5. Further reduction of Indonesian civil servants.
5.2.6. Indonesia and Portugal normalize relations.

5.3. **Period of Self-Determination:**

5.3.1. Upon agreement by all parties, the UN shall prepare a referendum on self-determination to determine the final status of the territory.

6. **Proposed Steps:**

6.1. Discreet soundings and steps to mobilize international support for the peace initiative.

6.2. Mobilization and consolidation of Christian (especially Catholic) support for the only other Catholic nation in Southeast Asia.

6.3. Commence prudent and circumspect diplomatic measures by special GRP representatives who enjoy good and close relationship with responsible Indonesian and East Timorese officials to initiate talks between the two parties.

6.4. Under the GRP's good offices, discreet discussions among Indonesian and East Timorese representatives with certain standing and authority is conducted to explore/flesh out the proposal. Manila should be an acceptable venue.

6.5. Once discussions reach a certain level of understanding and formal talks are ready to begin, the UN as well as other mediating third parties/individuals can be brought on board (or even earlier if warranted).

7. **Additional Inputs:**

7.1. The measures proposed during the **Period of Confidence-Building** (5.1.) especially if they are seen to be initiative of Indonesia or Indonesian responses to unilateral proposals from the GRP, would not signify any loss of face for Indonesia. On the contrary, not only would its presence in the territory be less offensive, its international stature would be greatly enhanced.

7.2 The **Period of Autonomy** (5.2.), would afford a new relationship between the peoples of East Timor and Indonesia. In fact, having experienced a period of peace and freedom without the hated symbol of Indonesian occupation, the Timorese might even opt to extend this form of association. On the other hand, the new generation of Indonesians might find it as part of the natural order of things that an independent East Timor maintains strong economic ties with Indonesia.

7.3. After the **Period of Self-Determination** (5.3.), the new East Timorese government of national unity (during the initial period, no matter what the election results are, will bring together into government all minority parties) and that within days of their independence, will seek membership in ASEAN and the South Pacific Forum.

7.4. There are more than reasonable grounds to expect the East Timorese to be extremely flexible and moderate not

only in their negotiating posture but in their bottomlines as well. It is the willingness of the Indonesians to relent from their heretofore intransigence that must be addressed, assuring them no loss of face, no diminution of international prestige, or any negative economic or political repercussions.

8. **Final Arguments Based on Historical Antecedents:**

8.1. Members of ASEAN have a moral responsibility towards one of its smallest neighbors. ASEAN members did not raise a voice of protest when its biggest member invaded East Timor; It is time to redress this wrong and the Philippines can play a leading role;

8.2. Members of ASEAN contributed to the resolution of the Cambodian conflict;

8.3. Indonesia is mediating the conflict between the GRP and the MNLF; Vietnam is mediating the conflict between the GRP and the NDF; (Note that these are internal problems of the GRP – an argument that Indonesia has used before whenever the conflict in East Timor was brought up by the international community)

8.4. **The Government of the Republic of the Philippines can and should do no less. It must discharge its moral and international responsibility to mediate the conflict between the Republic of Indonesia and East Timor.**

8.5. **In its own interest, the GRP cannot allow this opportunity to pass. Active involvement in the resolution of the problem will certainly enhance its stature in the international community. Moreover, the concomitant benefits and goodwill that will result should not be overlooked. Not only will President Ramos add much-needed luster and substance to the Filipino image but his contribution to the stability of the region and world peace, should he decide to act as the mediator, will forever be acknowledged by history.**